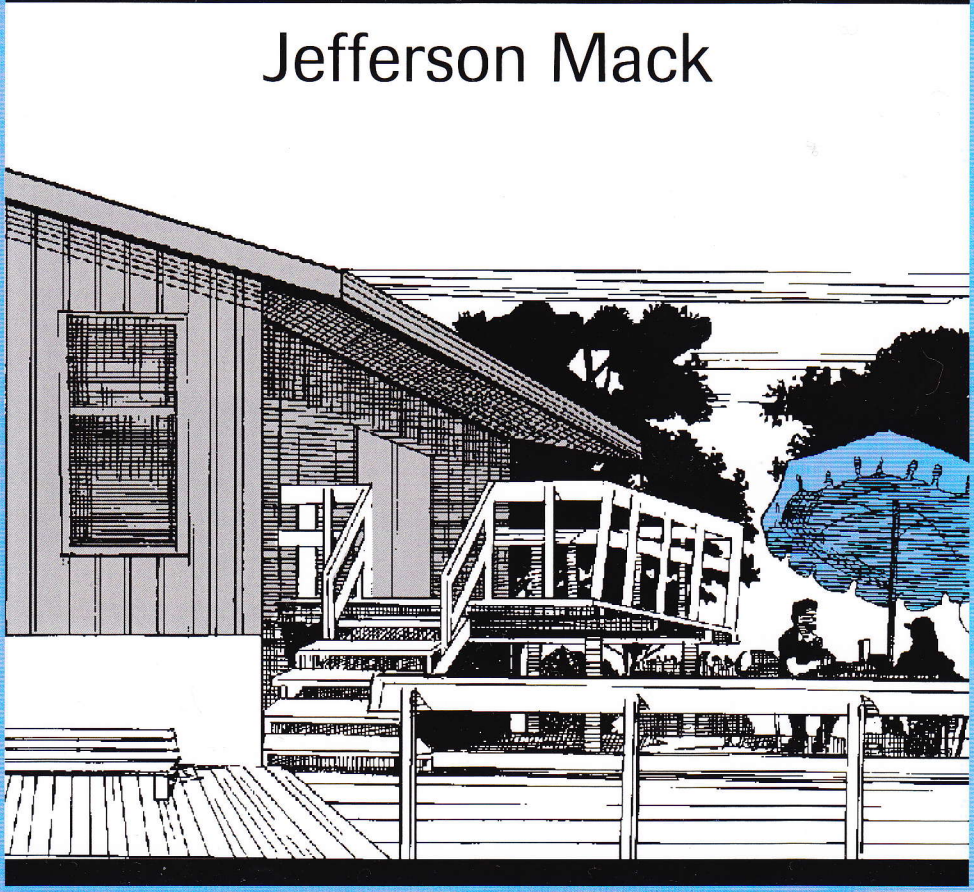
SETTING UP AND RUNNING YOUR OWN SANCTUARY

Jefferson Mack



THE SAFE HOUSE

The Safe House: Setting Up and Running Your Own Sanctuary
by Jefferson Mack

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Chapter 1

Runner's World

You are on the run! Every cop in the county has your name and photo on his clipboard, along with a list of the heinous crimes they say you have committed. You are scared and hungry, and you don't have a dime in your pocket. Worst of all, you haven't slept for 36 hours, and you're about to drop from exhaustion.

What you need is a place where you know you will be safe for the night, where you will find food to eat, a bed to sleep in, clean clothes, and enough money to get away once you've had a couple of nights' of sleep. It might be the home of a friend, or it could be the apartment of a stranger who believes in the same political or religious cause that's the real reason the cops want to lock you up forever, or just make you dead. It could be a place run by some mercenary with whom you have made previous arrangements for pro-

tection (in the event you ever found yourself in the jam you are in now) or somebody who knows you by a different name and thinks you are a new friend who shares his beliefs in religion or politics.

Whatever the specifics, the place must be controlled by people you trust, and it must be a place that those chasing you know nothing about. It must also be a place you can get to without being seen, and it had better be close at hand.

If you have access to such a place, you have a safe house, in which you just might survive and stay free. If you don't have a safe house, you are dead meat for failing to arrange for the single most critical piece of security required of anyone who engages in any dangerous activity.

In the strange new world we live in, in which laws multiply so rapidly that we can't keep track of what is legal and what isn't (almost all of us do something criminal every day, often without knowing it), any one of us could suddenly find ourselves in deep trouble and in need of a place to hide. Therefore, making prior arrangements for a safe house, or a series of safe houses, should be part of every personal survival strategy.

A BIBLICAL EXAMPLE

In our modern world, the people who give the most serious thought to safe houses are those working in covert intelligence. That's not surprising, because no one needs a safe house as much as a spy operating in enemy territory, and the use of a safe house by someone engaged in spying is as old as the Old Testament. We can read about it in the second chapter of Joshua.

> And Joshua the son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho." And they went,

> and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and lodged there.
>
> And it was told the king of Jericho, "Behold, certain men of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land." Then the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, "Bring forth the men that have come to you, who entered your house; for they have come to search out all the land."
>
> But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them; and she said, "True, men came to me, but I did not know where they came from; and when the gate was to be closed, at dark, the men went out; where the men went I do not know; pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them."
>
> But she had brought them up to the roof, and hid them with the stalks of flax which she had laid in order on the roof. So the men pursued after them on the way to the Jordan as far as the fords; and as soon as the pursuers had gone out, the gate was shut.
>
> Before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, and said to the men, ". . . Now then, swear to me by the LORD that as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father's house, and give me a sure sign, and save alive my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death."
>
> And the men said to her, "Our life for yours! If you do not tell this business of ours, then we will deal kindly and faithfully with you when the LORD gives us the land."
>
> Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was built into the city

> wall, so that she dwelt in the wall. And she said to them, "Go into the hills, lest the pursuers meet you; and hide yourselves there three days, until the pursuers have returned; then afterward you may go your way."
>
> . . . Rahab the harlot, and her father's household, and all who belonged to her, Joshua saved alive; and she dwelt in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

The safe house of Rahab the harlot is an excellent example of what makes a house a truly safe place for someone being hunted. First, it had a good cover story: it was a house of prostitution, where two strangers in town might be expected to spend the night. The cover story was so good that even when the king learned that the spies were hiding at Rahab's place, he still didn't suspect that Rahab might be helping the spies. Rahab's safe house also had a place on the property where the two spies could hide while the house was being searched as well as an escape route that allowed the men to slip away after the gates of the city were closed. As is often the case with a good safe house, the safe house provider had profitable reason for helping the spies: Rahab's life and the lives of her family.

THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

The term *safe house*, as a description of a place of refuge, was first used in connection with the Underground Railroad in the years prior to the American Civil War. The Underground Railroad consisted of a series of safe houses stretching from the South up to the Canadian border. Any escaped slave who managed to get to one of the first safe houses in the chain was almost guaranteed success in his

or her escape efforts. A safe house in the Underground Railroad might have been a private house, small business, country inn, or often, the basement of a church. Whatever the place, the escaping slave would find someone waiting to hide him, feed him, give him a place to sleep for the night, provide medical care if needed, and then direct him on to the next safe house in the chain.

Those who ran the Underground Railroad safe houses faced the same basic problem faced by every operator of a safe house, whether thousands of years before America's Civil War or many years after: operating a safe house was likely to be illegal, and the penalty for those caught, severe. Under the Fugitive Slave Act, even those operating safe houses in the North were violating the law and faced prosecution if caught. In the South, safe house hosts faced even greater danger from abolitionist-hating vigilantes. They therefore had to discover ways to let potential customers know how to find them while keeping their activities secret from both neighbors and the law.

CZECH MATE

The traditional use of the safe house as a place of temporary refuge for someone trying to escape to freedom continued during World War II, when resistance groups in almost every Nazi-occupied country in Europe established safe houses for escaped prisoners of war, aviators who had been shot down and hadn't yet been captured, potential political prisoners, and covert operations personnel hoping to return home after completing a mission.

The four Czech patriots who parachuted into Czechoslovakia and assassinated SS Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich hid in four different safe houses after the attack. Unfortunately, although the team successfully assassinated the hated Nazi, the operation also demon-

strated the tragic consequences of a security compromise. The Nazis captured and tortured several members of the Czech underground and learned that the four hunted men had all moved to the same safe house, a church in Prague, where they were hiding while waiting for a chance to escape Czechoslovakia. Nazi troops surrounded the church and eventually, after a fight that killed 14 Nazi soldiers, the four Czech paratroopers committed suicide rather than allow themselves to be captured.

The sad end of the Czech patriots demonstrates an important point about safe houses: whereas safe houses play a key role in just about every covert operation or escape, when such operations end in disaster, it's almost always because the security of a safe house was compromised. Men and women who thought they were safe, and who had every expectation to be safe, suddenly found themselves cornered, and soon after that, were either captured, killed, or forced to choose suicide.

WHY THIS BOOK?

Despite the importance of the safe house in both intelligence operations and in planning escapes, there is almost nothing available in popular literature that explains how to arrange for a safe house and how to maintain the security of that house while carrying out the mission. This book seeks to correct that deficiency and make available to the free citizen information that, up to now, has been tightly guarded in the highly classified training manuals used by intelligence agencies all over the world.

In recent years, the term *safe house* has been most often used in connection with special operations and intelligence collection as a place where the intelligence officer can engage in a variety of activities with a reasonable expectation that the enemy or the intelligence target has no idea

where he is or what he is doing. Such operators use safe houses for meetings with agents they have recruited, as part of a recruitment, as debriefing centers, and for many other purposes.

I have extensive experience in just this type of safe-house operation, and the same methods we used can be used in setting up a safe house for use in escape/evasion operations and survival situations. Therefore, although much of this book will focus on the covert intelligence safe house, the information will be just as useful to the person preparing for a survival situation in which he and family and friends require a safe house to ensure their survival and freedom.

Chapter 2

Who Needs a Safe House?

Intelligence officers enter unfriendly territory to collect intelligence by recruiting spies who have access to the information they need. To do that, they must have a safe place where they can meet with their intelligence sources. For the covert intelligence officer who is working in a foreign country, a safe house, or more likely, a collection of safe houses, is an absolute necessity. The CIA, KGB, Mossad, and just about every other national intelligence agency makes use of safe houses, and includes in their case officer training programs instructions on establishing and using a safe house and what circumstances require safe houses.

Sometimes, intelligence officers work under deep cover, that is, they pretend to be a loyal citizen or a legal alien living in the targeted country. In such cases they must not only carry false identity papers but also find a place to live

and work that dovetails with the false identity. Once they have established a safe house where they can live what appears to be a lawful, ordinary life, they will then have to establish additional safe houses where they can meet with intelligence sources without compromising their cover.

In the world of modern espionage, most intelligence officers work under embassy cover, that is, they are assigned to the embassy of the country for whom they are spying and pretend to be engaged in legitimate diplomatic activities. Although this gives them diplomatic immunity in the event they are caught collecting intelligence information, it also increases the risk that the host government and intelligence agents of enemy governments will be watching their every move, as well as investigating anyone with whom they make contact. Therefore, the intelligence officer working under embassy cover must establish safe houses where he can meet with intelligence sources. Of course, before he can use such a safe house for his meetings, he must first successfully evade the surveillance of the host country's counterintelligence services.

The more unfriendly and suspicious the host country, the more difficult it will be for a case officer to evade surveillance and meet with the spies he recruits. In the most dangerous situations, for example, a CIA case officer running a mole within the Chinese government, the case officer will almost always use a safe house in a third country. The recruited spy will meet with his control officer only when the spy can travel from the country in which he operates to a third country where he can meet the case officer and then proceed to a safe house there for meetings and training.

Although a safe house might be nothing more than a secret place where the case officer can meet with a new recruit, it can be used for more sinister purposes as well. Sometimes, a case officer will set up a safe house as a place

to blackmail the potential source. He offers the target for recruitment a safe place where the target can meet with a lover, play a game of chance, buy drugs, or engage in some other activity that he wants to keep secret from his friends, family, employer, and the law. In such a case, the safe house is a safe place for the intelligence officer, but not for the target, who will be engaging in acts that will eventually be used to blackmail him into becoming a traitor.

Once an intelligence officer has recruited a spy, he will need safe houses for occasional meetings with the spy. During such sessions, the case officer might discuss specific targets for spying, or he may offer some training in the art of spycraft. International spy agencies also will interrogate the recruited spy in an effort to judge his credibility, loyalty, and operational efficiency. (Such interrogations often include the use of a polygraph, which professional spies call a *fluttering*.)

IT'S NOT JUST SPIES WHO NEED A SAFE HOUSE

Anyone engaging in any ongoing activity that he or she wants to keep secret needs a safe house. Let's look at a few examples of the different kinds of people who might need a safe house.

Political and Social Dissidents

Legitimate citizens who are engaging in unpopular political and social activities often have good reason to fear that they will be suddenly targeted for restrictive legislation or unjust government action, sometimes with little warning. At various times in recent history, the FBI and other federal law enforcement agencies have tracked the activities of individuals operating on both the left and the right sides of the American political spectrum. Whereas

antiwar activists, communists sympathizers, and civil rights agitators were once the target of such investigations, currently popular targets for federal and state law enforcement agencies include those in the militia movement, gun rights advocates, tax protesters, animal rights activists, and unpopular religious cults. Even when government law enforcement agencies ignore such dissident groups, the members still often have to fear individual and organized bigotry.

Anyone who fits into such a category will want to foil surveillance by their enemies, including government agents, at every stage of organization, recruitment, and operational planning. One way to do that is by using safe houses for recruitment efforts, organizational meetings, planning sessions, and field training.

The need for safe houses becomes even more critical in tyrannical countries where the government severely limits or outlaws political rights. The same is true in every country occupied by an enemy. In such countries, antigovernment dissidents and resistance groups who are printing and distributing an illegal newspaper or political handouts must have a safe place in which to collect information, write the articles, and operate the printing press. They will also need safe houses where copies of the newsletter can be stored pending distribution.

Once such groups begin engaging in covert insurgent operations such as intelligence gathering, sabotage, assassination, and the ambush of government forces, the availability of safe houses will be a critical factor in achieving success. Active insurgent groups must have safe houses where they can hide supplies, hold planning sessions, train those engaging in armed cover operations, and hide those escaping after successful covert actions have taken place.

When we talk about dissident and insurgent activity, we must recognize that what has happened in so many other

countries in this past century could happen here. Novels, movies, and predictions about a future world in which despotic tyrants rule America are so popular precisely because we can all imagine such scenarios if the parasites who control our government continue down the same road they are now traveling. Survivalists, constitutional activists, Second Amendment advocates, and members of every cultural, social, and political minority who fear they will become targets for suppression must include in their planning for future events the establishment of a net of safe houses that they can use in the event their fears are realized.

Persecuted Minorities

Twelfth-century history is filled with bloody pages recording the persecution and mass murder of men, women, and children who threatened no one and wanted nothing but to be left alone, but who had the misfortune to be born to the wrong set of parents or work at the wrong occupation. At various times in different countries, Armenians, Gypsies, Jews, Chinese, blacks, tribal minorities, rich merchants, successful farmers, the well-educated, different religious groups, immigrants, and expatriates have all been massacred.

Anyone who is a member of any unpopular minority group or who simply chooses to live in a foreign country for purposes of business or pleasure is at risk. How much risk depends on the local potential for political upheaval, civil war, or total civil breakdown. When that happens, anyone likely to be singled out for persecution had better have plans for escape and evasion that include the use of safe houses as hiding places within that country and in at least one bordering country.

Risky and Illegal Behavior

Men and women around the world engage in acts that

would not be a crime in any truly free society, that is, acts in which all the parties willingly participate. They make love to people they haven't married, play games of chance, offer or buy prostitution services, trade in or use illegal drugs, practice religiously sanctioned polygamy, and violate the thousands of laws that control and regulate what should be personal choices. But it is not just the law these people want to avoid. They also want to keep such activities secret from spouses, family, friends, employers, and the neighbors.

Participants in the Underground Economy

Millions of men and women in every country with a heavy tax system or restrictive economic regulations work in the underground economy. As much as 15 percent of the American workforce is employed in such activities. Those numbers include illegal immigrant laborers, backyard mechanics, street vendors, home weavers, hairdressers, carpenters, plumbers, and furniture makers working out of backyard garages. Even such professionals as lawyers and doctors who don't want to pay the government a share of their earnings work off of the books. All of these economic criminals must, to some extent, take measures that hide their activities from the eyes of the law and the regulators as well as curious neighbors and licensed professional competitors. For as long as they operate without interference from the law, their shops, kitchens, backyards, and garages fit the criteria of what a safe house is supposed to be.

Legal Business Activities

Legitimate businessmen sometimes need a more secure place to do business than their offices. This is especially true in an age in which electronic snooping and corporate espionage become increasingly sophisticated with every new bit of technology, all while government bureaucracies

become more intrusive in their attempts to control and tax business dealings. The best way to make sure that a conversation is not bugged by a competitor, some criminal, or the law, is to hold that conversation in a safe house that has been swept for eavesdropping devices.

Situations in which a businessman might require a safe house include negotiating with a potential employee who doesn't want his current employer to know he is seeking a new job, corporate executives negotiating with competitors under circumstances that might be considered a violation of antitrust legislation, or those negotiating deals and mergers that must be kept secret until finalized. Sometimes, all a businessman wants is a bit of time and privacy. To get that he might rent or buy a cabin in some remote place, then keep the place a secret, even from his own staff, so that he can truly escape the pressures of business for a few hours or a couple of days.

Private Investigators and Intelligence Collectors

Anyone engaged in private investigations or intelligence collection activities, even under legal circumstances, will need private places where they can interview or hide witnesses, recruit spies, and store sensitive material, while avoiding risks to their own families and other innocents.

Anyone with Serious Enemies

In the world we live in, almost anyone can suddenly find themselves having to deal with deadly enemies who mean them harm. It might be an ex-lover or even a spouse in a marriage gone terribly wrong. Sometimes it's a fired employee, a jealous coworker, or some criminal who thinks you are a threat to his continued freedom because you happened to be in the wrong place at the right time to watch him commit a crime. Whatever the provocation, or the degree of our own innocence, we can all imagine a situation

in which the law can't, or won't protect us, and our only choice is to find a place to hide through the night that the enemy won't know about.

Law Enforcement Agencies

Although we usually think of a safe house being used by someone trying to escape the law, law enforcement agencies in America and elsewhere use secret locations unknown to the public as police facilities. Police authorities and public prosecutors sometimes hide a witness in a safe house until the witness can testify against some especially dangerous criminal. In many cities around America, police agencies are cooperating with private charities in setting up safe houses for battered wives and abused children.[1] Like international intelligence officers, police officers also use safe houses for meetings with informants and for purposes of entrapment. A good recent example of entrapment are the tapes viewed on the television news showing the mayor of Washington, D.C., engaged in the use of illegal drugs in a hotel room the feds had wired for complete surveillance. Police agencies in several American cities have also achieved considerable success in the use of safe houses where cops pretend to be fences willing to pay top dollar for stolen goods. Detectives working undercover on drug cases and targeting organized crime often establish a safe house as a temporary residence for the period of time they are working the case.

While the use of safe houses can be a legitimate tool in crime fighting, police forces in many countries also use safe houses to keep secret certain illegal acts by police officers. Police agencies of tyrannical governments around the world use safe houses to hold prisoners for special interrogations, which include the use of torture. This allows the police and security agencies to maintain a facade of legality, as the use of a safe house limits the number of people who know who

is being held without legal cause or who might even be tortured. Because the victims never see the inside of a government building, even if they eventually manage to escape, they cannot prove that the men who tortured them were police officers. This also makes it much more difficult for friends and family to discover where the political prisoner is being held. Government officials will always deny that the government security forces had anything to do with the disappearance.

Common Criminals

Every successful criminal who stays in business and avoids jail is a criminal who understands the principles of using a safe house, even if he doesn't think of it in those terms.

Those who defraud, rape, rob, or murder need a safe place where they can plan the crime, store the tools of crime, hide out between crimes, and when possible, lure the victim to and commit the crime in relatibe privacy, as did Jeffrey Dahmer (the cannibal who killed helpless victims in his house, stored body parts in his refrigerator, and cooked them up on his stove). Smarter criminals will have several different safe houses where they can hide out when the heat is on.

THE BASIC NEED IS ALWAYS THE SAME

Regardless of why someone needs a safe house, the basic requirements are always the same: someone is engaged in an activity that he or she must keep secret and needs a place where he or she can go to avoid discovery. Doing something that must be kept secret is what the intelligence trade calls a *covert action*. Those who engage in covert activities are called *covert operatives*, the term I will use to describe anyone who needs a safe house.

All covert operatives share a common fear that the safe house will be discovered by someone who will do them harm. That might be an enemy in wartime, the local law, a business competitor, a jealous lover, a criminal hoping to silence a witness, or a national policy agency. For simplicity, I will use the term *enemy* to describe a person or organization that creates the need for secrecy.

IT'S NOT JUST THOSE WHO NEED A SAFE HOUSE WHO NEED THIS INFORMATION

While the reader may never have any need for a safe house for his or her personal use, he or she may someday have a family member, a friend, or someone who shares a political or religious belief whose very survival may depend on finding a safe house. In a very high percentage of critical situations in which a safe house ensures survival, the safe house will be the home or business of some previously innocent party who has never been directly associated with the covert activities of the person who needs a safe house. Indeed, as I will explain later on, the best safe house of all is a home or business that is occupied by someone who has lived a public life and who appears to be above reproach and suspicion.

As none of us know what the future might bring, understanding the principles of setting up a safe house should be one more piece of knowledge in the survival strategy we follow.

THE CASE STUDY METHOD OF LEARNING

The best way to demonstrate how those in any of the above categories might set up a safe house is to use case studies from real life. I will do this in the following chapters. While several of the case examples are from my own experience or the experience of my old colleagues, the reader will also understand why each of the cases has been disguised to protect both my informants and ongoing intelligence operations. All names are fictitious, of course, and some details in each example have been changed to further hide the identity of the participants. A select few of the case studies will be entirely fictitious, to allow me plausible denial should anyone attempt to claim I have invaded their privacy or revealed national security secrets.

ENDNOTE

1. While they are called safe houses, refuges for battered wives and victims of child abuse differ from the traditional safe house in that their locations are advertised rather than kept secret. The safety of such places depends on fast police protection and not on secrecy.

Chapter 3

What Is a Safe House?

A safe house is a house, building, or other physical location in which someone can hide from an enemy or where someone can engage in risky activities with little chance of being discovered.

SECRECY IS ESSENTIAL

What makes a safe house safe? High walls? Strong locks on the door? An electronic security system? Electronic countersurveillance equipment? Well-armed guards? No. A safe house is safe because it appears to the enemy to be a place used by ordinary people for ordinary purposes, such as a middle-class home occupied by a law-abiding family, a farmhouse, barbershop, summer vacation home, church, candy store, or any other legitimate, normal part of a com-

munity. But such a place doesn't have to be a house or a business location. It can be an apartment on Fifth Avenue, a trailer home sitting in a trailer park, a cabin in the country, a yacht anchored in a bay, a boat in a marina, or even a recreational vehicle parked beside a mountain stream or in a shopping mall's parking lot.

The only universal requirement is that any stranger who makes contact with those working or living inside the safe house will find no reason to suspect that the place is anything but what it appears to be. The safe house is the dwelling equivalent of the purloined letter left lying on the mantel above the fireplace so conspicuous that no one would suspect what important secrets are inside. Only those who are active, willing participants in whatever activity requires a safe house will know what the safe house is really used for. Everyone else, even those living in the house or visiting the property, will have no reason to suspect what the house is hiding.

THE BEST KIND OF SAFE HOUSE

The very best safe house of all is a place occupied by people who have lived in the house for some time, even years, who have the respect and friendship of their neighbors, who work in regular jobs, attend church, send their children to school, fulfill their civic duties, and who have never been openly identified with the cause that requires the use of their home as a safe house. Such people may be putting themselves at serious risk by allowing someone or some group to use their home or business as a safe house. They take that risk for one of four different reasons:

- They knowingly support the cause of the covert operative.

- They may not support the cause, or perhaps even know what the cause is, but the covert operator has offered something of value that makes the risks worthwhile.[1]

- They have been fooled into believing that the covert operator is acting on behalf of a cause they do support.

- They have been fooled into believing that the person they are allowing the use of their home will not engage in any illicit or dangerous activity.

THE SECOND-BEST CHOICE

If such a place cannot be found, then the second-best choice is to purchase or rent a home, business, or any other physical location under circumstances that suggest that the newly acquired property will only be used for ordinary, legitimate purposes. The covert operative will have to find such a property, then will have to either occupy the place himself, or find someone who will occupy the place and use it for what appears to be ordinary, legitimate purposes.

The person setting up such a safe house will have to deal with people such as real estate agents, property owners, landlords, and apartment building doormen, as well as cleaning and utility service personnel. He must take every precaution to ensure that such people have no reason to suspect that the property will be used for anything except a legitimate purpose. The fewer people who know what a safe house will be used for, the more secure the safe house will be. You must make very sure that only those with a need to know have any knowledge of the safe house and that all others have no idea that something other than the ordinary is going on there.

DECEPTION

Every successful safe house depends on deception and must therefore have a cover story that hides its secrets. The cover story should, if at all possible, be based on truths that can be verified by checking public records, interviewing neighbors, and making visual checks on the property. The simplest and best cover story is that the safe house is occupied by law-abiding people who have never been involved in any illegal, dangerous, or political activism. The deception in such a cover story will be when the occupants continue to hide their secret support for the illegal or dangerous activities hidden behind their closed doors and explain changes in their living patterns, visitors to the home, and other unusual events related to the use of the home as a safe house.

Even legitimate cover stories require at least a few lies to hide the truth. The family members in the perfect safe house must have a ready story that explains the presence of a stranger in their home. They could claim that the person occupying the guest bedroom is a cousin visiting town on vacation or an old school buddy who lives in a distant city.

Every cover story will be different and will depend on the specific circumstances of each situation. A cover story might be nothing more complicated than telling neighbors that the illegal immigrant hiding out in the basement is a friend met during a vacation to Mexico. A more sophisticated cover story could require setting up a legitimate business, say a restaurant, hotel, or massage parlor, that would be open to the public, but with space that could occasionally be used as a hiding spot for escaped prisoners or spies.

THE TWO TYPES OF SAFE HOUSES

Safe houses generally fall into one of two different categories. The first is the *defensive* or *passive* safe house, which is used to hide people, actions, and materiel from the world. All those using the place as a safe house will be voluntarily engaging in an activity that requires a safe house. The defensive safe house will be a sanctuary from the world, a place where anyone who enters can find safety from investigation, and capture while they rest, await further developments, plan future operations, or enjoy the cover of secrecy while engaging in illegal activities that do not immediately impact on anyone outside the safe house.

This is the kind of safe house where an escaped prisoner can hide out, two illicit lovers can meet, friends can smoke a joint, a woman can braid a friend's hair without registering herself as a beautician, a prostitute can entertain her customer, a loyal and trusted spy can be debriefed, two poachers can skin and butcher a deer, wounded guerrillas can recover, or saboteurs can plan their next attack or store the explosives they will use.

The second type of safe house is the *aggressive* or *active* safe house, which is used for operational purposes requiring secrecy, which includes bringing people to the safe house who are not knowing and willing participants in the covert activities. It might be a place where prisoners or hostages are held by a guerrilla band; where unsuspecting people are recruited to the cause through bribery, entrapment, or fraud; where untested spy recruits are trained and debriefed; or where police officers secretly videotape criminals selling illegal merchandise to someone they believe to be a fence.

While everyone who uses a defensive safe house has a justified expectation of safety within its walls, those who enter an aggressive safe house will include both those who know the true purpose of the safe house and those who have an unjustified expectation of safety and who may indeed be in great danger. This is not a safe house for all

who enter, but rather only for those who are in control. The hotel room rented by DEA agents is a very safe place for the cops, but not for the heroin dealer who thinks he's making a sale at a good profit. The bachelor apartment where two married men take their pick-up dates for a little loving will be safe for one of the men—an intelligence case officer whose date is really one of his service agents. The second man, whose date was prearranged by the operative, has no idea that his every action in the bedroom will be videotaped and his life forever altered.

These two types of safe houses are mutually exclusive. Although a defensive safe house might become an aggressive safe house, it should never be used again as a defensive safe house once it has been used for operational purposes. Defensive safe houses can often be used for months or even years, or not be used at all, but held in reserve in expectation of some future need. Aggressive safe houses have a much shorter life span and may even be set up for a single event. While a private home occupied by real people makes a good defensive hideout, one wouldn't want to risk the home of a loyal supporter who could be placed in great danger should the safe house be compromised. On the other hand, a covert operative might use the private home of a stranger, or even a known supporter of the enemy's cause as an aggressive safe house, provided he can arrange the use of such a place under a false flag, as described in Chapter Six.

Most covert operatives require both kinds of safe houses, one for hiding out between operations and one (more likely, several) for use while engaging in direct action (sabotage, assassinations, raids, and so on).

Each of the two types of safe houses have different requirements that must be addressed in the planning stage. For example, a defensive safe house should have good hiding places on the property where the safe house manager can hide people, documents, or materiel. Someone setting up an aggressive safe house where prisoners will be interrogated will either want a place in a remote area or a building with thick walls and heavy curtains that can confine loud noises.

The common characteristic that both the defensive and aggressive safe house share is that each must appear to be a place used for ordinary, legal activities by ordinary, law-abiding citizens.

WHAT EVERY GOOD SAFE HOUSE SHOULD HAVE

While the safe house must appear to be an ordinary place of no interest to the authorities or the enemy, the best and most secure safe house must have several additional features.

The safe house should have easy access and escape routes, preferably with both walking and auto approaches and retreats in several different directions.

When choosing a safe house, one should also consider the mode of transportation that will be used by those arriving at the safe house. In the United States, that usually, but not always, means a place with adequate parking, preferably off the street. In most countries and in large American cities, the place should be near bus or subway lines or in a part of town where it is easy to catch a cab.

Once, in Thailand, I operated a safe house that had a street served by a bus line on one side and a canal on the other. Those using the safe house could arrive either by car or boat. They could also walk away through a vacant lot or slip into the black waters of the canal and swim underwater for 50 feet before coming up for a breath of dark night air.

One of the reasons why homes in the country are such popular safe houses with intelligence officers is that they

often offer easy access routes, lots of privacy, plenty of parking, and no nosy neighbors with an immediate view of the house and surrounding land. However, if a safe house is to serve agents working in the inner city who will depend on public transportation for travel to and from a safe house, a rural country house 20 miles away makes no sense at all.

The safe house should be situated so that people both inside and outside can discretely observe all approaches. At the same time, all windows should have heavy curtains, and the thicker the walls, the better. The occupants of the safe house shouldn't keep the curtains closed at all times but should do everything possible to appear to be ordinary people living or working in an open manner with nothing to fear. The last thing someone in a safe house wants is a nosy neighbor seeing him peaking out through the venetian blinds like he was afraid someone might be watching the house.

Those using the safe house must fit within the normal flow and cultural patterns for the neighborhood and the building. They must be able to enter and leave without attracting the attention of the neighbors or local law enforcement officers.

If one is going to hide newly arriving illegal immigrants from Asia, it wouldn't be a good idea to establish a safe house in the basement of a church in an upper-class, mostly white suburb. Nor, for that matter would it do to use a church in the part of town where lots of businesses hire illegal immigrants and where the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) runs regular raids. A better place would be a church in a well-established ethnic neighborhood where most of the residents are citizens or legal immigrants, but who are inclined to be protective toward their more recently arrived fellow immigrants.

The simpler the furniture, floor plan, light fixtures, and interior decorations in a safe house, the better. Simplicity

makes it easier to spot something that has changed position, and makes it harder to hide microphones, miniature video cameras, and so on. At the same time, the furniture and interior of the safe house should match the cover story.

If at all possible, the safe house should have good hiding places where documents, weapons, and even people can be stashed for hours, or even days. If the house contains an attic, basement, or some crawl spaces, the entrance can be disguised or special corners sealed off. If such spaces are not available, then pieces of furniture, large stereo speakers, or similar items can be placed in the appropriate area. Floor safes can be installed under furniture or kitchen appliances where documents or other valuables can be hidden.

Now let's take a look at how a safe house is actually set up.

ENDNOTE

1. As we will see, something of value might be nothing more than friendship, but it could be sex, entertainment, goods and services, or money.

Chapter 4

Setting Up a Safe House

When setting up a safe house, one has to determine exactly what is needed, identify a specific piece of property that fits the requirements, and then, if necessary, convince the current occupants to make the property available as a safe house. The second and third steps are often reversed, that is the covert operative first identifies all those who might be willing to offer their property as a safe house then determines which property best fits the requirements.

By its very definition, a safe house must be someplace that is already being used for legitimate, safe, and overt activities. Making such a place a safe house means using the preexisting legitimate cover to hide the covert activities in which one intends to engage.

The first step then is to determine what the requirements are. Will the safe house be used for defensive

purposes, or will the covert operations officer need an aggressive safe house where he can meet with untested or even hostile individuals? If it will be a defensive safe house, the usual choice will be either a personal home or a small business establishment. In low-risk situations in which one is not already under suspicion, it could even be the operative's own home, or another piece of property he or she already owns or rents. (Don't do this in a life or death situation, especially if it would put your family at risk.) It might be the home of someone who supports the cause or a property occupied by a stranger whom the covert operative can either convert to the cause or trick into believing he or she will be serving a cause he or she actually supports.

If the operative needs a safe place to interrogate uncooperative people, deal with a crook in hopes of entrapping him, entertain potential recruits, or engage in some other aggressive action, the operative must look for some place that cannot be connected afterward to him or his covert action group by those he has invited into the safe house. The best choice might be a hotel room, rented office space, or a property that the operative rents or borrows under a cover story.

There are a number of other questions that must be considered before deciding what specific property fits the bill as a safe house. How long will the operative require the use of the safe house? What actions will the operative have to take should the safe house be compromised? Who will be visiting the safe house, and how much can the operative trust each expected visitor? Will those using the safe house be fugitives or others who have already been identified by the enemy, or people the enemy has not yet identified? How will they travel to the safe house, and will they have the skills necessary to successfully evade surveillance? Will the operative be taking hostile or untested

people to the safe house? If so, how will the operative transport them there? Who will occupy the safe house when it's not being used as such? How far can those people be trusted?

And there are more concerns. Who, exactly, is the enemy? If the enemy is a government, what government agency has responsibility for discovering what the operative is doing, and what action will the agency take to stop the covert activities? How effective is the enemy and how much effort will enemy personnel make trying to discover the covert activities? What methods are the enemy likely to use in attempting to identify the operative and his cohorts, and how high will the covert activities be on the enemy's list of investigative priorities? What's the best way to avoid or defeat the enemy's attempts at discovering the covert activities?

The covert operative will want to establish specific "must have" requirements, such things as whether the safe house must have escape routes, internal hiding places, a phone, cooking facilities, and sleeping quarters, and whether someone will be occupying the safe house when it is not being used for other purposes.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Setting up a safe house can be an expensive endeavor, but it doesn't have to be. Nevertheless, anyone setting up a safe house must have usable financial resources.

Large government intelligence agencies such as the CIA usually don't have to worry about the expenses involved in setting up a safe house. However, smaller intelligence agencies, such as the Mossad, do have to watch what they spend. For the private individual, small business enterprise, or political activist group, costs can be a difficult burden and may limit options.

THE COVER STORY

An important part of the analysis and planning phase is designing a cover story. As I have already pointed out, the basic cover story for every safe house is that the house is occupied by law-abiding citizens who pose no threat to anyone and who have never been publicly identified as supporters of the cause.

It is much easier to convert a legitimate home, which has been long occupied by the current residents, into a safe house than it is to build a legitimate cover from scratch. Therefore, it's best to find someone who is living an ordinary life, at least to all outward appearances, who will allow his or her property to be used. In such a situation, all that will be necessary in building a cover story will be creating explanations for unusual activities, new visitors, and any changes in the lifestyle of the house's occupants.

If such an innocent piece of property is not available, then the operative must create a much more elaborate cover story that will convince real estate or rental agents, property owners, utility companies, and new neighbors that the property will be used for nothing out of the ordinary. This will almost always require establishing a false identity for use while dealing with such people.

FINDING A PLACE THAT FITS THE REQUIREMENTS

While an operative is analyzing his or her needs, the security situation, and how it all fits within the budget, he or she will also be looking at potential properties. The first place to look is at property that friends, supporters, and sympathizers of the operative own, rent, or otherwise legally occupy. The easiest, most obvious solution is to borrow the home or other property of someone who supports the

operative's cause and who can be trusted with the operative's life. This would include friends, relatives, and those who otherwise support the operative's activities. (The latter group might not necessarily know the person requiring a safe house. Indeed, it's better if they don't have any prior connection to those who will be using the house.)

When an operative borrows a piece of property from a friend or a supporter as a safe house, he usually won't actually take over the entire property. The person or family lending the property will continue to occupy it and will provide the primary cover story. Depending on circumstances and risks, the occupants may remain in the house while it is being used as a safe house, or they may take a vacation, do a night on the town, go shopping, or visit friends whenever it is being used.

Most of the time when we talk about a safe house, we are talking about this kind of situation. Insurgents in a just war against a tyrannical state, members of an underground fighting a foreign invader, a persecuted minority seeking to escape being shipped to a concentration camp, or political dissidents who find that speaking the truth has suddenly become a crime will not have the funding or the time to set up safe houses by buying or renting properties and then occupying them. Instead, they will have to find others who support or sympathize with their cause and who are willing to make their own homes a haven where a fugitive can hide, materiel can be stored, or people can meet for whatever reason.

In the great majority of cases in which decent people had to find a safe house because of the rigors of war, natural disaster, civil unrest, persecution, or unjust government action, they found safety in the home or business of someone who supported their cause or sympathized with their plight. The people who hid runaway slaves prior to the Civil War or escaped prisoners of war in Europe during World

War II used their homes, farms, and small businesses as safe houses.

Unfortunately, using the property of a friend, relative, or fellow conspirator has a major security downside, in that the enemy has identified the operative and is looking for him or her, and if the enemy can discover the association between the operative and the person offering the safe house, the enemy will be watching that person and waiting for the fugitive to show up. Police catch a surprising number of fugitives when the crook makes the mistake of trying to hide out with a friend, close relative, or lover. Operatives should therefore use the home or residence of someone they know only if they can be absolutely certain that the enemy cannot identify the home owner as a possible provider of refuge. This usually means that the operative must not have had any direct association with the person providing the safe house for some time, perhaps even years. Anyone who begins engaging in covert activities that will create enemies must cut all open ties with anyone who might offer a safe house at some time in the future. The operative must also destroy, hide, or encode all records that could tie him or her to the potential safe house source. This doesn't necessarily mean that no contacts can be made, but it does mean that all such contacts should be made using security measures that leave no records and escape any surveillance or other investigative action by the enemy.

What works best in this kind of situation is finding someone with whom the operative has had no previous personal association, but who he knows supports the cause even though they have not been actively engaged in the covert activities. Just about every cause has a range of people who support it, but who choose to not become true activists, for example, they would never own slaves, but they didn't want to ride with the Redlegs trying to drive slavers out of Kansas; they hated the Nazis who occupied

their country, but they didn't have quite enough courage or the physical resources to join the underground; they may whisper to friends they trust about how much they fear and hate the current unjust regime, but they don't want to take the risk of saying so in public, and they don't want to personally take up arms against the government.

Most often, the leaders of an activist cause wouldn't want such people in an operational role, even if they tried to join up. They might be too old, too out of shape, or simply not have the kinds of skills it takes to become good covert activists. Nevertheless, such people, who often feel guilty about their failure to get active, can provide safe houses for the more daring activists. The smart operative will make a point of identifying such people and will try to convince them to offer their homes as safe houses should such a service ever be needed. Once they have been identified as potential suppliers of safe houses, they should be encouraged to hide their true views and live lives that make them appear to be no threat to anyone.

Borrowing a place to use as a safe house from a friend, relative, coconspirator, or sympathizer works best if one makes such arrangements long before one needs the house. If at all possible, anyone who intends to engage in any covert action that might result in needing a safe house should make such arrangements before going active. Survivalists, those who intend to lead armed resistance groups, covert political action committees, or any other covert action group, should develop and regularly update lists of supporters who own potential safe houses. Despite the inherent risks in using the homes of friends and supporters as safe houses, the leaders of most covert action groups around the world keep lists of known supporters who can be counted on for such services, but who cannot be easily identified by the enemy.

Even if a potential covert operative does not now need a

safe house, he or she ought to be making arrangements for the possibility that he or she might someday have a sudden, critical need for one.

As a committed survivalist who plans for every possible emergency, I know a dozen or so home owners spread over five states with whom I could seek refuge if I ever required it, and they could do the same with me. We never write letters to each other. We don't even send each other Christmas cards. We do make occasional contact, but we always call from a public phone. Sometimes, when one of us is traveling, we stay with each other, but we never introduce one another to friends and neighbors, at least not by the right name. Indeed, each of us has a well-rehearsed cover story. When I visit Jim, who lives in a Chicago suburb, I'm Bill Jakes, the guy who saved his life when he was drowning in a lake when we were teenagers. Don's friends in San Diego know me as Craig Stokes, who played on Don's high school football team back in the 1950s.

It behooves leaders of covert action groups to identify possible supporters and to keep in touch with such people so that they can be tapped to provide safe houses if needed. The Mossad regularly tracks the *Sayanim*, Jews who are citizens of other countries but who are sympathetic to Israel and would willingly provide assistance to Mossad agents. The Sayanim number in the thousands and are spread around the world. None of them have any direct contact with Israeli intelligence officers except when they are approached and asked to perform some special service. That service is often providing a safe house for Mossad agents operating near where they live.

USING A BUSINESS AS A SAFE HOUSE

Another way to establish a safe house is to convert a legitimate business enterprise owned by a supporter into a

safe house operation. This works especially well if the nature of the business offers an easy explanation for a sudden change in the customer traffic patterns. Hotels, motels, warehouses, office buildings, farms, and factories all have spaces that can be used as safe houses.

A businessman who supports a citizen militia group might allow the militia group to store equipment, weapons, and ammunition in one of his warehouses. Another businessman might offer unoccupied offices in his headquarters building to an ethnic group protecting illegal immigrants who face prosecution in their home country if deported by the INS.

Buildings owned by churches, social clubs, and even political organizations can also be used as safe houses, provided the leadership of such organizations support and approve of the covert activity and are willing to take the risks. (You will recall that churches were often used as safe houses in the Underground Railroad and that the four Czech men who assassinated Reinhard Heydrich were discovered by the Nazis while hiding in a church in Prague. During America's painful Vietnam years, some churches offered secret sanctuary to absent without leave [AWOL] soldiers who were conscientious objectors, and more recently, other churches have taken to hiding illegal immigrants from Central American violence. Just about any profit or nonprofit organization that owns or rents a building where people gather or do business can usually find a space where someone can hide people, weapons, or other materials.)

Chapter 5

When Sympathizers Can't Be Found

Finding a safe house can be much more difficult if one can't identify friends, supporters, or sympathizers who will offer their own property. The obvious solution in such a situation is to rent or buy a piece of property and convert that property into a safe house. To successfully do that, the operative will have to use a false identity or set up a false business front. He or she will also have to arrange for a supporter or one of his or her agents to occupy the property and establish a cover story that makes it appear that the property is occupied by people who intend to use it for normal purposes.

That's how the international spy masters do it. Renting, buying, or borrowing a piece of property under a false front is such a common practice among international intelligence agencies that some wags suggest that a major inflationary

factor influencing the price of rural properties in the northern Virginia countryside is the willingness of just about every embassy in Washington, D.C., to pay top dollar for rural properties near the nation's capital, which can be used as safe houses.

Of course, each of those properties is purchased or rented through false fronts, fake identities, or offshore corporations, with each foreign intelligence agency making every effort to keep the true purpose secret. Naturally, as soon as the FBI discovers the existence of such a safe house, and the safe house operators figure out they have been made, the embassy involved has to come up with more cash to set up a new false front and then buy or rent a new piece of property. Even the CIA has such a piece of property, called The Farm, where all CIA intelligence officers take their basic training. For years, the location of The Farm was considered top secret, but like so many things done by the CIA, the secret wasn't very well protected. Now, many of those living in the area can point the place out to tourists and any foreign agent who cares to ask.

Generally, an intelligence officer working in a foreign country will set up and maintain several different safe houses, at least one of which will be a defensive safe house for his own living purposes, while the rest will be aggressive safe houses that he will use for recruitment, training, and debriefing purposes.

Back when I knew him, Dick Uhling was a CIA case officer working under embassy cover in Bangkok. He had set up several safe houses, two of which I knew about. One was a small, wooden, two-bedroom house on a side street in a lower-middle-class neighborhood. Dick had a young female Thai service agent[1] rent the house in her own name and live there. Both let the neighbors assume that the woman was being kept as a mistress by an American businessman, even though Dick's relation with her was sexually innocent.

(At least that's what he always insisted to his supervisors.) As further cover, Dick sometimes entertained trusted American government and business contacts at the safe house so that the neighbors would become used to seeing people going in and out of the house at odd hours.

Dick's real purpose for the safe house and the only time he used the safe house for covert purposes was as a place to hold secret meetings with a high-ranking spy working with the Burmese government in Rangoon. The recruited spy didn't dare meet with any Americans in Rangoon, but he did occasionally travel to Bangkok on official business. When he did so, he would sneak out of his hotel and go to the safe house late at night.

The second of Dick's safe houses that I knew about was an apartment in an five-story building not too far from the infamous Patpong Road (a sleazy nightclub neighborhood that offers tourists a variety of delights appealing to every kind of sexual preference, with the exception of chastity). Two Thai businessmen and a senior Thai government official shared with Dick the cost of the expensively furnished apartment, which included a stocked liquor cabinet, movie projector with a bookcase full of porno flicks, and two live-in maids who were willing to do bedroom duty in the event the businessmen didn't make a classier connection for the evening. The four men each had one evening reserved for their private use. The three free nights were available on a first-come, first-served basis. The men had a simple telephone code they could use when one of them wanted to ensure that he would have total privacy on a certain night.

The three Thai men knew Dick worked in the American Embassy, but they thought he worked in the office dishing out economic assistance to the Thai government. They assumed that Dick was using the apartment for the same reasons they used it: a safe place where they could take their dates with no fear that their wives and families would

learn about their extramarital activities. In fact, Dick was using the safe house as a place where he would take men from communist country embassies whom he was targeting for recruitment as spies. He would supply girls, booze, and anything thing else they might want as part of the experience not for purposes of blackmail, but as a way to win their trust and to encourage habits that would create a need for extra income, which Dick would eventually offer in return for spying.

Dick had also recruited both the maids as his service agents. He was paying them considerable sums to spy on the three Thai businessmen and their guests, which often included high-ranking Thai officials. Dick had secretly wired the whole place for sound with the expectation that eventually he would learn something that would help him recruit additional intelligence resources within the Thai government.

WHAT A PROFESSIONAL CAN DO, SO CAN AN AMATEUR

Jack and Jill Hill decided to rent a mountain cabin to use for some legally and socially risky recreational activities. Their decision to rent rather than buy was based on two factors: they knew that it is much easier to rent property by using a false identity than it is to buy, and they intended to use untaxed income to pay for the cabin.

Prior to renting the cabin, they set up false economic identities that they used to set up a front corporation in an offshore tax haven. They listed their false names as the CEO and deputy CEO of the corporation, Recreation Consolidated, International. They then opened a bank account in the name of the corporation in a second tax-haven country and deposited the money necessary to pay the rental fees for the first couple of years.

In all their dealings with rental agents, they explained

that they wanted the cabin for family vacations, weekend getaways, and hunting trips for senior employees of the corporation. They also let it be known that they would sublease the cabin from time to time, which they have in fact done, making enough money off of the subleases to pay most of the costs of renting the cabin.

Jack and Jill now have a safe house that cannot be easily traced to their real identities. They have constructed a secret cache site on the property where they keep their stock of marijuana and cocaine, their drugs of choice. By advertising in swinger magazines (using false identities, of course) they have slowly developed a list of couples who share their interests in sexual and drug adventures who now attend their private parties in the cabin. None of their new friends have any idea of Jack's and Jill's real identities; they think that Jack and Jill are subletting the cabin from an international recreational company.

Anyone engaged in high-risk behavior, especially if the activity includes other people, should always set up a safe house under a false identity rather than using one's own home. The trick is to make sure that any hostile investigations will not be able to identify the covert operative as the owner or renter of the new property. The operative will not only have to buy, rent, or borrow the property under a false identity, he or she will also need a good cover story to make it appear that the operative will be using the property for legitimate, ordinary purposes. The operative will also need a cover story to explain to friends, family, and others where they spend their time when using the secret safe house.

HOTELS, MOTELS, AND OTHER COMMERCIAL ESTABLISHMENTS

The easiest way to rent space for a safe house, especial-

ly if the requirement is for only a few days or a couple of weeks, is to rent a room in a hotel or motel or perhaps sublet an apartment. Professional intelligence officers and assorted police agencies often use hotel rooms as safe houses. Police officers frequently use them as hiding places for protected witnesses. Hotel rooms also make great places to set up a buy/bust operation, in which a dope dealer thinks he's doing a deal in a safe place and never suspects he's dealing with cops until they have the evidence they need to put him away.

Obviously it's not a good idea to rent a hotel room as a place where one can interrogate a prisoner, but hotel rooms do just fine for exchanges of money or materiel, meetings, recruitment efforts, nonviolent interrogations, and as a temporary hiding place for personnel. There must be no way that anyone who is investigating or seeking to thwart the covert action can discover that the operative is renting such a place or trace the rental to the operative once he has finished occupying the space.

The key to ensuring that such a place qualifies as a safe house is, again, deception. The hotel room or other facility must be rented under a false identity, or better yet, no identity at all. The kind of identification required to rent a hotel room varies greatly from country to country. In many countries (I've found them in Thailand, Japan, and Panama), the larger cities have short-time hotels that cater to illicit lovers. Such places never require any identity document, rent by the hour, and often provide garages or curtained parking spots to hide cars as well. Every intelligence case officer I have known who was working in one of those countries used love-nest hotels on an almost daily basis. The only caveats are not to use the same hotel with any frequency and to vary routes of travel when driving to a hotel that has been used before.

In countries where the law demands that those checking in to a hotel show a national identity document or a passport, renting a hotel room as a safe house is more difficult, but not impossible. Sometimes, a simple bribe to a desk clerk combined with a plausible explanation for not having ID (perhaps a stolen or lost wallet) will do the trick. Fake ID, if it's good enough to pass a quick exam by a desk clerk, is always a solution.

As is always the case whenever one uses a safe house, those traveling to and from the hotel must exercise extreme caution to avoid surveillance.

SETTING UP A FALSE BUSINESS FRONT

Just as it is possible to use a legitimate business location that a supporter already owns as a safe house, anyone can rent a business location and establish a business that appears to be legitimate but will serve as a safe house.

A Mossad agent who was targeting Arabs visiting New York City several years ago rented an office suite in one of New York's skyscrapers and painted a sign on the door announcing the New York office of the Arab/British Overseas Petroleum Investment Corporation, a company that did not exist. The office was staffed with a secretary and an executive officer, both of whom were local service agents working for the Mossad. The only customers who ever entered the office were potential recruits who were invited to the office for interviews, discussions, and training sessions. The office was also used for debriefing spies, including spies who had traveled from the Arab world for the specific purpose of meeting with their control officers.

As the Mossad intelligence officer was operating under a false flag, the potential recruits had no idea they were dealing with the Mossad. Instead, they believed that they were dealing with British subjects who were hoping to make a major investment in Arab oil, and who were will-

ing to pay top dollar for Arab agents who would represent their interests.

Just because one sets up a business as a front for a safe house doesn't mean one can't make a profit, too. One religious group in the United States has long been targeted by the IRS and several other government agencies to the point where several of the members have been forced to hide out to avoid arrest. The leaders of the well-financed "church" have quietly acquired several hotels, resorts, and spas in different parts of the country through corporations set up by trusted members. While the businesses produce considerable income for the church coffers, they also serve as safe houses where those members having trouble with the law can hide out until the heat dies down. Even though the feds know what is going on, the legitimate customer traffic into the resort areas is so heavy that the feds have no way of identifying which guests are registered under false identities and are using the hotels as hiding places.

The nature of a business activity can be the very reason a safe house is needed as well as why a false-front business will best serve as a cover story. Mark Ratigan is a computer nerd who works as a commercial World Wide Web page designer from an office in his own home. He also sells porn on the Internet, but he doesn't do that from his home. Mark doesn't want his children, his friends, his relatives, and certainly not the IRS, to discover his extra source of income. He is also keenly aware of the fact that as government intrudes more and more into our private lives, what is legal today may be illegal tomorrow with severe punishment.

Using a false identity, Mark rented an office in a building in a low-rent district and painted a sign on the door that announced an export/import business. He then set up a corporation in another state, using a collection of false identities as the corporate board membership. He next opened a bank account in the name of the corporation using cash and

money orders. He put a phone connection and a computer in the office, then opened an account under another false identity with a local Internet service provider.

With that done, Mark designed a Web page where anyone with a credit card could download the pornography he posts on his Web site. Mark does all his banking with the corporate accounts by mail and phone. He does his own office cleaning, and the building manager, who thinks Mark is indeed a legitimate businessman, knows him only by the false identity.

Mark's porno business is doing so well that he washes some of his profits through his legitimate business run from his own home. He is also thinking about the possibility of expanding into porno production. If he does so, he will set up a photo studio as yet another safe house. This will be open to the general public for portraits as well as graduation and wedding photos. He'll use a whole new set of corporate and economic false identities and different sets of employees to run the legit side of the business during regular working hours in addition to those who do the porno shoots after hours.

From here we'll examine some alternatives.

ENDNOTE

1. Intelligence case officers often recruit local nationals to provide a wide variety of administrative and operational services. Called service agents in the trade, such recruits sometimes openly work as embassy employees. On the other end of the security spectrum, someone used as a service agent may not know whom he is working for but will have been recruited under a false flag.

Chapter 6

The Other Alternatives

Although it is easy for an intelligence officer working for a national spy agency or someone spying for a big corporation to secure the funding to rent or buy a safe house, most private citizens the kind who might join a militia, get on the wrong side of a politician or his cops, or belong to the wrong church won't have access to that kind of cash. Unless such a person is planning to engage in some well-paying but illegal business enterprise, budgeting the money to rent or buy a piece of property for a safe house will be out of the question, especially if the safe house will be used for more than just a few days. If an operative faces such a situation, there are other alternatives, although each entails risks because the operative will be dealing with people who would not normally cooperate with him.

FRAUD AND THE FALSE FLAG

A solution often used by professional intelligence officers when it isn't convenient to rent or buy a piece of property is to con someone into providing a safe house by convincing them that the intelligence officer will be using the property in support of some cause that the occupant actually supports.

Using fraud to secure a safe house always requires the use of a *false flag*. The false flag is the intelligence officer's single most important tool in spycraft. It is used for recruiting spies, for deceiving the enemy into thinking the operative is a harmless person, and for obtaining the use of such things as weapons, transportation, communication routes, and safe houses. Flying a false flag means that one pretends to be something one is not, to gain the voluntary cooperation of the people with whom one must deal.

The false flag used in setting up a safe house can be as simple as conning a girl met in a bar to share her bed and the safety of her apartment because she thinks the new lover is rich, single, and looking for commitment. But a false flag can also be as complicated as claiming that one is a friendly government agent, with an identity backed up with a fake government ID, a driver's license, a passport, and credit cards, all supported with business telephone numbers that will be answered by people who will support the false identity.

An American intelligence officer I once knew in Ecuador was looking for a safe house where he could secretly meet with students and low-level government employees whom he hoped to recruit as spies. He met a young Ecuadorian architect who often defended leftist causes and who owned a small house near where he lived. The American case officer, who was of Latin ancestry, pretended to be a Cuban intelligence officer spying on Americans working in

Ecuador. When the case officer said that he was looking for a safe house where he could recruit people to spy on the American Embassy, the Ecuadorian was happy to make his home available for such a purpose, especially when the fake Cuban offered to pay for the favor. The intelligence officer thus tricked the architect into serving the intelligence needs of the United States, a country he would have never voluntarily served.

There can be several different false-flag cover levels. One of my colleagues working in Bangkok under diplomatic cover during the Vietnam War years was tracking local political activists controlled by Communist bloc intelligence officers. In the coffee shops and university student centers he introduced himself as Bob Niles, a Canadian world traveler. To support that identity, he carried a fake Canadian passport, a collection of personal documents, and traveler's checks in the name of Bob Niles, which could be legitimately spent.

Whenever he made friends with anyone who supported leftist causes, he would eventually confess that he was really an American antiwar advocate who was helping disgruntled American GIs stationed in Thailand go AWOL and escape to Canada. He had letters and faked newspaper articles that legitimized that identification, although he almost never had to show them.

One friend to whom he told the second story was an underground Thai labor activist named Thongdi. My colleague asked Thongdi to lend his home as a meeting place for a few Thais who were willing to hide American GI defectors from the U.S. military police.

My colleague was really using Thongdi's place to meet with members of a ring of spies he was running in an attempt to infiltrate the Soviet Embassy in that city. He also planned on using Thongdi's place as a hideout in the event he ever succeeded in enticing one of the Soviet diplomats to defect (something that never materialized).

Describing in greater detail how one goes about establishing a false identity in support of a false flag operation is beyond the scope of this book, but the reader can find more about the subject in my book *Running a Ring of Spies* (Paladin Press).

As with so many things in the spying game, an operational technique used by a CIA or KGB case officer is also an operational technique any private citizen can use.

By using a cleverly constructed false-flag cover story, it's possible to fool many people into doing a lot of things, including, sometimes, loaning the use of their property under circumstances that could put them at great risk without their knowing it. To do so, the operative must convince such a person that the operative is someone the target can trust and want as a friend. The operative then asks the new friend for some help in solving a problem and may pretend to be engaged in some innocent activity, or he may admit that he is asking the target to engage in something dangerous, but on behalf of a cause that the target would willingly support. The following are a couple of examples of how a private covert operative can con an innocent home owner into loaning his home as a safe house.

Jake Dickles is not his real name, but a select group of clients think he's the best news since politicians amended the Constitution to allow an income tax. Jake is an accountant who charges big fees to help his clients cheat big time on their taxes in ways that avoid the attention of the IRS. Jake travels every year to several states to meet with clients, and he often stays in a city for a week or more while he meets with them. For obvious reasons, Jake does everything possible to make sure that the IRS' auditors and special agents don't discover his real identity, even if one of his clients should decide to blow the whistle on his activities. His precautions include the use of safe houses whenever he travels, rather than staying in hotels. He sets up each safe

house while using another false identity, that of Alfred Blitzer, who allegedly is a deeply devout member of a conservative Christian church who finds a place to worship in every city he visits. Alfred has made lots of friends during his visits to worship services around the country, and he keeps in touch with them by using a mail drop address under his false identity. His church friends are happy to put Alfred up in their own homes whenever he visits their city. They all believe he is traveling in support of a nationwide Christian antiabortion movement, which covertly encourages more than just peaceful political action in attempting to halt the practice of abortion.

Dickles never uses these safe houses as meeting places with his tax clients, and he takes all the usual precautions to avoid surveillance when he travels from a client's office or home back to the safe house for the evening. At the same time, because his hosts believe that he is actively supporting covert action against abortion doctors, they not only don't ask questions about where he goes every day but also won't answer any questions about their guest should some law enforcement officer come around to visit them.

On one occasion that did happen, shortly after the man the home owner knew as Alfred left town. The good Christian not only refused to tell the man showing federal credentials anything about his recent house guest, he wrote Alfred about the visit. That warning allowed Jack Dickles to immediately sever the relationship he had with a customer in that town, who he was sure had sold him out to the IRS.

David Santini is 24 years old, stands just under six feet tall, and has a face that is not quite handsome and the body of a pro quarterback. He is an environmental activist who has participated in several equipment-wrecking and tree-spiking attacks against the lumber industry in the Northwest. He travels frequently in connection with his monkey-wrenching activities, always by car and never in

the same vehicle. Whenever possible, he stays in safe houses rather than hotels, especially on trips in which he engages in covert activities.

David finds his safe houses through romance. He looks for women who are single, working in jobs that pay reasonably well, and who have their own apartment. He finds them in churches, libraries, movie theaters, shopping malls, banks, and business offices, and sometimes on university campuses, where he looks for instructors, librarians, and graduate students. He usually picks the unattractive, but not truly ugly or grossly overweight wallflowers who so often hope for some romance in their dull lives.

Santini has half a dozen cover stories that he uses when he approaches new women, picking each story to fit the personality of the target. As George Brent, he's a private investigator working for a major law firm serving the interests of large corporations, including several forest product companies. As Darrow Jones, he's a technical representative for a manufacturer of logging equipment. As Jim Davis, he's a copilot for a charter air service. And as Roger Vector, he's a novelist traveling to gather background information for his next novel.[1]

Santini has developed to perfection his techniques for winning an invitation to share the bed of one of his new girlfriends for as long as he is in her town. He treats the women well, never takes economic advantage of them, and keeps in contact via mail drops and long-distance calls from safe phones. He often stays with the same woman he met on a previous trip to her town. Two of his girlfriends actually work for the timber industry, and a third is a Libertarian Party supporter who actively campaigns against environmental activists. Such ladies not only provide Santini with a safe place to stay the night and a safe phone to use during the day but also information that he can use in his covert monkey-wrenching operations.

In both of the above cases, the operative is not putting the victims of his fraud in any real danger. At most, they would suffer embarrassment and anger should Santini be exposed. More often, especially when dealing in international espionage, using fraud to acquire a safe house does put the victimized property owner in deadly danger. And in some situations, an operative who needs a safe house may deliberately use fraud to find a safe house to do damage to his enemies in the event the safe house is compromised.

Michael Gordon is one such example. Michael deals in cocaine, supplying quality merchandise in wholesale lots to several dealers who service upper-middle-class customers in Midwestern cities. In each of the cities where he makes his deliveries, Michael, under cover of a false identity, has made friends with strangers with the sole purpose of using their homes as safe houses where he stays as a guest, gains use of their telephones to call his dealers, and sometimes stores his goods (well hidden in his suitcases, of course). He sometimes even uses the homes of his patsies to meet with customers.

Michael finds his potential victims on university campuses, in churches, shopping malls, singles bars, and just about any place else where people mingle in an atmosphere that encourages casual conversation. He weaves a false flag to fit each individual. One friend thinks he's an animal rights activist who engages in covert operations to free captured lab animals. A college baseball player in another city knows Michael as Ron Murphy, a talent scout for a big league baseball team, and a third friend believes that Michael is a campus radical trying to revive the leftist activism of the 1960s. Others know him as a rich playboy who likes to travel as cheaply as possible, an actor who plays bit parts on Broadway, and an advance man and political consultant for a major political party.

Whenever Michael is staying in a safe house one of his

friends unwittingly provides him, he spends money freely and provides a bit of excitement and variety in their otherwise dull lives. None of them suspect that Michael is putting them at great risk. Should the narcs ever make Michael, those who offer him the use of their home could be charged with narcotics possession and, perhaps, conspiracy to deliver illegal narcotics. Even if they are not convicted, they could lose their homes, cars, and bank accounts under asset seizure laws.

The use of a fraudulent cover story to establish a safe house can even prove deadly to the unsuspecting host. If the covert operator is a saboteur, an espionage agent, or involved in antigovernment activities in a repressive political state, the friend who thinks his guest is a college professor, a mid-level government bureaucrat, or a lover may find him- or herself standing beside the trickster in front of a firing squad.

Saboteurs, terrorists, political assassins, and espionage agents know that using a false flag to establish a safe house is the best way to ensure that the enemy cannot trace them to a safe house by watching the homes of suspected sympathizers. Because such patsies are often supporters of the very regime that the operative is targeting, he also gains the satisfaction of knowing that, should he be caught, the enemy will almost certainly also punish one of their own by mistake.

FORCE

Someone in great danger can establish himself in a safe house by forcing the owner to make the property available. One example of this is the criminal on the run who breaks into a house, captures the family, and then holds the children hostage while he allows the father or the mother to go about their usual activities for several days while the heat

is on. Such a safe house is of time-limited value. As a ploy for establishing a safe house, it works best if the occupant of the property is living in a remote rural area, is retired, or living as a recluse. This is extremely risky behavior in most circumstances.

Those who use force are usually incompetent criminals with a high risk of eventual capture. The exception is when either organized crime figures or government police agencies force unwilling cooperation, usually from people who already have good reason to fear either the Mafia *capo* or the government police agency. One example would be a situation in which a narcotics agent might force a snitch to provide a place where the agent can meet with suspected dealers.

BLACKMAIL

It's also possible to secure a safe house by using blackmail instead of a physical threat. This can be somewhat safer than threatening physical force, especially if the occupant of the property doesn't believe that he is being placed in any serious danger.

Trevor was a married man with a taste for loving on the side but with a tight budget that didn't allow for motel rooms where he could take his dates. When Trevor accidentally learned that a coworker, Chet, was cheating on his travel expenses, Trevor made a deal. He wouldn't blow the whistle and get Chet fired, if Chet, who was unmarried, would allow Trevor to use his apartment whenever Chet had to travel on company business. As Chet traveled for a couple of days just about every week, Trevor made frequent use of the coworker's apartment.

Like force, blackmail is a dangerous business. If my life, freedom, or livelihood must depend on someone else, I don't want that person to be someone who hates me. Trevor

learned that lesson the hard way when Chet finally got access to a trust account his father had established. The last time Trevor used Chet's apartment, a private detective got lots of pictures, which Trevor's wife used to get a divorce settlement, which in turn took all the fun out of the rest of Trevor's life.

While I strongly recommend against using force or blackmail to set up a safe house unless there is no other alternative, I also note that intelligence and security officers of governments around the world frequently do use both violence and blackmail as means of securing the use of safe houses.

Smart covert intelligence case officers will not engage in direct blackmail. Instead, they will set up a situation in which some third party, who is controlled by the case officer, does the blackmailing. The case officer then steps forward and resolves the problem, thus earning the gratitude of the target.

I once knew a police general in Southeast Asia who sometimes had to meet with American intelligence officers under circumstances in which he wanted to impress them with lavish entertainment, without drawing the attention of the press or that of his political enemies. He set up a scam in which a bureaucrat in the national tax office attempted to blackmail the owner of a luxury hotel with a threat of exposing some massive tax evasion in which the hotel owner was involved. When the hotel owner agreed to a rather gigantic payoff, the police general arranged a raid on the meeting for the payoff, then pretended that the cops had been following the blackmailer, but had no idea what an important citizen he was blackmailing. Instead of arresting the hotel owner, the general's men took him directly to the general's office. In a one-on-one meeting, the general suggested that a messy trial, publicity, and destruction of the hotel owner's business was not in the national

interest. When he learned that he was not going to be arrested or exposed, the grateful hotel owner was only too happy to offer the general the use of an entire floor of his hotel, as well as the use of any of the hotel's kitchen and service staffs whenever the general needed to discretely entertain his guests.

STEALING A SAFE HOUSE

If one can't buy, rent, beg, or borrow a safe house, it might be possible to steal one, at least for a short time. The best example of this kind of safe house would be when an escaped prisoner or a covert operative on the run breaks into a vacant house or apartment and quietly occupies the place for a day or two.

Like burglary, stealing a safe house is best done when the occupants are not in the house and are unlikely to return for as long as the covert action personnel will be using the property. The ideal situation for doing this is to find a house or apartment that is unoccupied and will be for some time. That might be a summer home in the mountains, a vacant piece of property for sale at more than the market price, or the home of some deceased person whose property is tied up in litigation. It might also be a home that is occupied, but where all members of the home are out during large portions of the day. This is not that difficult to find, at least in America. With both partners in most marriages working, the average suburban household or urban apartment, even a home with small children, stands vacant for long hours every day, with the adults at work and the kids in school or day care. Middle-class suburban neighborhoods with large lots offer the best possibilities. However, the house should not be in a neighborhood where family income is so high that home owners wire their houses with silent alarms.

Chuck Lister is a freelance investigative reporter living in northern Virginia who has written several articles exposing the secrets of important national politicians and the alphabet soup of government law enforcement and intelligence agencies. Several years ago, when law enforcement officers arrested one of his most sensitive sources, Chuck suspected that the source's identity had been compromised by a pen registry[2] on Chuck's home phone. Since then, Chuck, who might make hundreds of phone calls in the course of investigating someone, has avoided using his own phone whenever a pen registry might compromise a source or a potential source.

Finding a safe phone in a safe place, especially when he needed to make multiple calls, was not all that easy in the upper-middle-class, semirural suburb where Chuck lived. Public phones were widely scattered, and Chuck found that standing in full view at a public phone in a service station, shopping mall, or a supermarket entrance didn't fit his professional needs. Checking in to a hotel room for the purpose of making an afternoon's worth of phone calls, the only alternative he could find, proved too expensive. Nevertheless, Chuck found a solution to his problem, albeit quite by accident. He had gone to the home of a potential source whom he had hoped to catch still at breakfast before she left for work. When he couldn't hear the sound of the buzzer when he pressed the button, he tried the door, found it unlocked, and opened it a bit to shout the woman's name into the house. Getting no answer, he stepped through the door without really thinking about it.

Once inside and sure that no one was home, he looked around hoping to spot some evidence that the woman might be involved in corrupt practices. While he found nothing of interest from an evidence point of view, he did find a telephone. On an inspiration, he sat there at the woman's kitchen table and made about three dozen phone calls over

the next three hours. By the time he quietly left by the back door and walked back to his car, he knew he had found the perfect answer to his need for a safe house where he could make telephone calls without revealing his contacts to a pen registry.

Since that first day, Chuck has systematically checked out dozens of different houses in several suburbs in northern Virginia. He looks for places where the owners are not only absent all day, but where the neighbors are also gone during the normal working day. He picks homes where he can park a block or so from the house and then make an approach through alleys, vacant lots, or wooded areas without being seen by neighbors or passers-by. He only uses houses where he can find easy entry, either through a door or a window left open, or a house with door locks that are simple to manipulate. While most of the calls he makes from his safe houses are local calls, when he does make long-distance calls, he uses a prepaid calling card.

Finally, let's examine the importance if total secrecy.

ENDNOTES

1. There really is an almost unknown author named Roger Vector and it's not Santini. However, when Santini plays that role, he carries a few of Vector's paperbacks, which he gives to the girls he seduces.
2. A pen registry records all numbers that a telephone receives or makes but does not record conversations. Unlike a phone tap, a pen registry does not require a warrant, and there is no way that the phone owner can discover that the information is being recorded by the phone company and passed to either a local or federal law enforcement agency.

Chapter 7

Guarding the Secrecy of a Safe House

Every safe house begins as a well-guarded secret; a property occupied by what appears to be ordinary people or a legit business that is being used by people engaged in dangerous, and probably illegal, activities. If the secret is compromised it will happen in one of the following ways. Each security error has specific defenses.

ONE OF THE OPERATIVE'S AGENTS OR SUPPORTERS SELLS OUT TO THE ENEMY OR HAS BEEN WORKING FOR THE ENEMY ALL ALONG

This includes those who sell out for money or other inducements and those who are captured by the enemy and give the secret away during interrogation, perhaps because

of torture, but more often as part of a plea bargain. It also includes those who have been working for the enemy all along and who have infiltrated the covert group.

There are five defenses here.

1. Anyone engaged in covert activity of any kind must establish personnel security practices that will identify supporters who have sold out, those who are ringers, and those who have personal problems that make them high risk.

2. The best safe house defense against infiltration, sellout, treason, or enemy interrogation of a prisoner is to strictly limit the knowledge of covert activities and the identity of safe houses to those who have a need to know.

3. If anyone who has knowledge of the safe house is captured or disappears without explanation for any length of time, or if evidence is discovered of a suspicious loyalty of someone who knows the secret, the safe house must be immediately abandoned.

4. When in doubt or when dealing with people whose loyalty has not been proven, set up an aggressive safe house under a false-flag cover, then use it for only a short time or for a single recruitment effort.

5. Make sure that untrusted subjects being taken to a safe house cannot learn the location of the safe house as they travel. This usually means blindfolding the subject for the last portion of the trip, putting him in the back of a windowless van, or taking him to the safe house at night and driving a roundabout route that includes several dark stretches.

THE ENEMY DISCOVERS AN OPERATIVE'S CONTACT WHO IS PROVIDING A SAFE HOUSE

This often happens in criminal cases when a fugitive hides out in the house of a friend, lover, or relative. It also sometimes happens when witnesses to criminal activity, people being stalked, or victims of domestic violence attempt to hide out by using the home of a friend or close relative as a safe house. It can also happen when saboteurs or rebels seek refuge with old friends or relatives after an attack on an enemy force.

There are two defenses.

1. An operative setting up a safe house for anyone likely to be hunted by an enemy must make sure that there is no way for the enemy to identify the safe house by tracing the previous acquaintances and contacts of the hunted party.

2. There must be no records left behind that could be used to identify a safe house. This includes property records, court documents, phone records, letters of reference, employment records, medical records, and even personal letters.

THE ENEMY TRACKS A SUSPECT TO THE SAFE HOUSE

Sometimes the operative either knows or must assume that the enemy has identified him and will have established some kind of surveillance. This is always the case with intelligence officers working under embassy cover who must assume that both the host government and the agents of hostile governments have them under surveillance. Such operatives must be well trained in the techniques for spotting and

breaking surveillance. They may be under surveillance at any time, and they must act accordingly at all times.

The much more dangerous situation is when an operative believes that the enemy has not identified him as a subject of interest and therefore does not bother to take evasive action to ensure he is not followed to a safe house.

Two defenses are as follows.

1. It is imperative that the operative never approach a safe house until she is certain that she is not being followed or tracked. Even if the operative has no reason to suspect that the enemy has identified her, she must follow sound security procedures for spotting and evading surveillance on every occasion when visiting the safe house.[1]

2. The operative should use surveillance avoidance techniques not only while traveling to the safe house but also when leaving the safe house in the event that an enemy has identified the nature of the house and is tracking the movements of all those who enter and leave.

THE OPERATIVE UNKNOWINGLY TAKES A SUBJECT WHO IS UNDER SURVEILLANCE TO THE SAFE HOUSE

This often occurs when the operative takes someone to the safe house for purposes such as interrogation, entrapment, or capture. However, it also happens when a loyal supporter comes under enemy suspicion without knowing he has been so identified.

There are two defenses in this instance.

1. Verify through countersurveillance that all those who are taken to a safe house are not under surveillance.

The covert operative or his trusted agents must meet the subject on neutral ground. They must set up their own surveillance to ensure that the subject is not under enemy surveillance as he travels to the meeting place. The operative then takes surveillance avoidance action as he takes the subject to the safe house.

2. Set up an agressive safe house that cannot be traced to the operative and use that safe house for people who might be under surveillance. Keep the safe house active for only as long as necessary, then abandon it.

A TIP SUGGESTING POSSIBLY ILLEGAL ACTIVITY BY THE OCCUPANTS CAUSES THE ENEMY TO SURVEIL THE SAFE HOUSE

Anyone who offers his home as a safe house to fugitives, escaped prisoners of war, insurgents, saboteurs, foreign agents, or illegal dissidents is engaging in high-risk behavior that could result in the loss of their property, imprisonment, torture, and even execution. People engaged in dangerous activities have a natural tendency to change behavior because of the stress or fear of being caught. They cut off contacts with old friends and change their behavior, such as looking over their shoulder as they walk down the street or suddenly jumping whenever they are surprised by some noise or just the sudden appearance of an old friend. They stop inviting friends in for social events, turn down invitations they would once have accepted, and avoid casual contacts with friends and neighbors. Then they fail to create and memorize believable cover stories for such changes in behavior. Such actions arouse suspicion and invite curiosity, which can lead to discovery.

The more tyrannical the state, or the more dangerous the

political, military, or law enforcement situation, the greater the likelihood that one's neighbors or local authorities will become suspicious because of changes in daily routines.

The best defense is as follows.

1. Everyone associated with a safe house must act in a manner consistent with previous behavior patterns whenever dealing with friends, neighbors, and the authorities. This is not something one can suddenly start doing. Developing a proper mental attitude that allows one to act naturally when scared to death requires planning and practice. Therefore, anyone who expects to engage in any covert activity inside their own home, or who plans to offer their home as a safe house, must practice beforehand the deceit necessary to make a cover story plausible.

   If one establishes personal security practices that include the use of deceit[2] when their home is not being used for dangerous purposes, then when one does start using a home as a safe house, friends, neighbors, and the authorities will not see the behavior necessary to hide the activities as something new and suspicious. Those who develop behavior patterns that protect privacy long before their homes become safe houses will be acting in a manner consistent with expected behavior when such practices are the difference between life and death.

DEVELOPING A SAFE HOUSE MENTALITY

The best safe houses are those that were ordinary homes or business locations for many months or years before someone started using them as a safe house. If you can't imagine a set of circumstances that would require that you make your own home a safe house, think again. Indeed, you may already be engaging in some activity that

is illegal or antisocial and even dangerous to the community. The great majority of men and women who are involved in some risky covert activity are doing so in their own homes. Every day, millions of people around the world use their own homes to engage in dangerous or illegal sex acts, read forbidden literature, plot illegal business deals, swap insider trading information, watch porn movies, cheat on their taxes, process poached game, drink alcohol when underage, use illegal drugs, plan violent crimes, or conspire to start a revolution.

Most people who are doing something illegal or dangerous behind the walls of their own home know nothing about the basic security requirements of setting up a safe house, yet the great majority of people who engage in covert activities in their own home are never publicly identified, prosecuted, or punished. For those who do understand the basics of security, a private home can be the best kind of safe house for both the occupants and for those seeking sanctuary. This is true even in countries without the protection offered by the Fourth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.[3]

The trick in using your own home as a safe house is to do everything possible to ensure that no potential enemy has any reason to suspect what you are doing. This requires a much higher level of attention to personal security and privacy than most people in the modern world practice, even those now using their homes as hiding places for illegal, dangerous, or antigovernment activities.

If you are doing anything, or will in the future do anything inside the walls of your own house that you don't want the government, business competitors, neighbors, personal enemies, or criminals to learn about, you must abide by the following commonsense rules and make sure every member of your family does the same. This will not only increase your own chances for avoiding trouble but will put you in a

position where you can offer your home as a safe house to those you want to protect, without having to change the way in which you deal with friends, neighbors, and authorities. Even if you don't think you have to worry about your privacy, you ought to follow most if not all of the following rules, if only to protect yourself and your property against the common criminal, and, perhaps, a criminal government.

RULE ONE: WHEN IN PUBLIC, ALWAYS ACT AS INNOCENTLY AS POSSIBLE

If you are living or working in a safe house, you want to blend in, not stand out. Follow all the appropriate social conventions that rule community life where you live. Pay attention to building strong family ties and peacefully resolve family disputes when they arise.[4] Don't admit to anyone who is not directly involved any details of your illegal or dangerous activity. Don't brag about your cleverness in cheating on your income tax, the great dope you have stashed away, how much you won in a recent poker game, the number of unregistered guns you own, the traffic fine you didn't pay, or your support for a local antigovernment group.

RULE TWO: DISCRETELY BUT PASSIONATELY GUARD YOUR PRIVACY

The less outsiders know about your personal life, the more difficult it will be for them to identify some unusual behavior that makes them suspicious. The individual who does nothing to protect his privacy and who suddenly starts guarding his privacy is much more likely to draw unwanted attention at the time he needs it least than the person who has a long history of guarding his privacy with a passion.

Guarding privacy has become increasingly difficult in an age of Social Security numbers, driver's licenses, credit

cards, telephone directories, Internet E-mail, and junk mail. Every bit of such information is computerized and readily available to just about anybody who wants to go looking for it. Even if you have an unlisted telephone number, if you own property, put money in the bank, have a driver's license, order magazines, or belong to any clubs or professional organizations, someone can find you, provided they know your real name and a little bit about you.

The secret in such a world is *not* to live an anonymous life in which your name never gets entered into computers. Indeed, that in itself will make you a suspicious person worthy of further investigation by anyone who looks for your public record for any reason. Instead, handle all matters dealing with your identity, including your credit ratings, employment, business, and public associations, in such a way that anyone who accesses that kind of information will find only evidence that describes you as an honest, law-abiding, typically dull citizen. You can keep a bank account, carry and use a couple of credit cards, buy property, pay taxes, apply for a passport, carry a driver's license, find a good job, start a legitimate business, and get an E-mail address. As long as you don't use any of those things in support of any covert activities, and as long as you pay all your bills, your real identity will be the best possible cover.

You can't avoid having a public record in computers, but that doesn't mean you have to make it easy for anyone to discover the massive amount of personal information that never gets entered into national computer banks. Don't volunteer information to casual acquaintances about your work, your finances, or your private behavior. Don't brag about your wealth, income, personal activities, political beliefs, favorite restaurants, or hobbies. Don't write letters to newspaper editors, make public threats against government officials, put political bumper stickers on your car, argue politics or religion with strangers, and don't waste

time expounding upon your philosophies in Internet chat rooms. Such activities seldom influence the course of human events, but they can make enemies who will want to know more about you. What they will try to find out will be the very things you want to keep private and secret.

Learn the art of being friendly without revealing personal information. That's easier to do than it sounds. Most people would rather talk about themselves than listen to other people, so learn to be a good neighbor who would rather listen to other people than brag about your own dull life. You want neighbors and casual acquaintances to think you are such a boring, ordinary person that you are not worth a moment of gossip. Practice the same rules when answering telephone calls, especially unsolicited calls from strangers. Don't talk to telephone solicitors except to ask them not to call back. Don't answer any questions they might ask, even if they claim to be doing a political survey or to be taking a poll in support of some cause you fully support.

Law enforcement officers, private detectives, spies of every stripe, as well as con men and violent criminals, work phones for information by using what they call *social engineering*. They will claim to be legitimate salesmen, solicitors for charitable donations, a supervisor from the home office, pollsters, or people searching for long-lost relatives. When they ask the first question, answer politely that you never buy anything or donate to any charity as a result of a telephone solicitation, and that you do not give out any personal information over the phone. Then hang up.

RULE THREE: CHOOSE YOUR CLOSE FRIENDS CAREFULLY, THEN DON'T TRUST THEM UNTIL THEY PROVE THEMSELVES OVER THE YEARS

No matter what good friends you have, don't tell or even

hint to them about your covert activities unless there is an operational reason for them to know. When you entertain friends who don't know about your covert activities, make sure you hide well all evidence of those activities before they come visiting.

Be very careful in adding new friends to the short list of people you will trust with your secrets. Be suspicious of people you meet under strange or unusual circumstances or who spontaneously attempt to become your friend with no good explanation, especially if they don't share any important common interests or they start to ask probing questions about your lifestyle, politics, or religion. If such people start bragging about their own secrets or illegal acts, don't take that as evidence that you too can share secrets. Indeed, if they aren't telling you lies in an effort to discover your secrets, then they are careless fools with whom you should never share secrets.

Remember that being a neighbor is not a good reason for making a friend, unless you discover shared interests and common philosophies. You want to act in a courteous and friendly manner whenever dealing with neighbors, but don't be the one who volunteers to host the neighborhood Christmas party, tries to organize a block watch, or is the first to knock on the door of the people who just moved into the neighborhood.

RULE FOUR: AVOID FIGHTS AND DISPUTES WITH NEIGHBORS

You don't have to be the neighborhood whimp, but you should carefully pick the disputes where you make a stand, and make sure you are the one within the law. Even then, try friendly persuasion and neighborly cooperation first, then try it again. There are people who make terrible neighbors and who will deliberately look for ways to cause you

trouble, no matter how hard you try to get along. If you have one of those, don't use your home for covert activities. The best solution may be to sell the house and move somewhere else.

RULE FIVE: LIMIT, TO THE MINIMUM NUMBER POSSIBLE, THOSE WHO EVER SEE THE INSIDE OF YOUR SAFE HOUSE

Don't let strangers into your house under any circumstances, especially if they suddenly appear unannounced at your door, no matter what kind of story they tell. If you want to buy insurance, a vacuum cleaner, or an encyclopedia, meet the sales agent at his or her office or their home. If you want to investigate a new religion, ask the two young people knocking on your door the address of their meeting house and tell them you'll talk to them there. If someone knocks on the door and asks to use your phone because of an emergency, ask for a number to call and a message to give, then leave them standing at the door, with the door closed and locked, while you dial the number. One of the best arguments for doing your own plumbing, painting, rug cleaning, and electrical work, is that doing so keeps strangers out of the house.

When you must allow appliance and utility service personnel, delivery boys, or casual acquaintances in, sanitize the entire house first, making sure that there is no evidence of your covert activity in sight or easily found by opening a drawer or peeking into a bathroom cupboard. Keep any strangers or casual acquaintances under close surveillance at all times while they are inside. If you can't live without a cleaning lady who comes in twice a week, arrange your schedule so that you or a family member is in the house while she does the cleaning.

RULE SIX: DON'T USE THE PHONE TO DISCUSS ANYTHING YOU WANT TO KEEP A SECRET. THIS INCLUDES USING THE PHONE FOR SENSITIVE E-MAIL AND FAX CONNECTIONS

If, in lower-risk situations, you decide to chance breaking this rule, don't *ever* use a cordless or cellular phone under any circumstances when talking about information that someone could use against you. Don't talk to your banker, lawyer, stockbroker, doctor, or even your employer while using such devices. The higher the risk situation, the more important this rule is. Assume that every conversation on a wireless phone is being monitored by your enemy.

The solution to the phone security problem is not in setting up some kind of coded communication system using public or open lines connected to the safe house, such as using computer modems to transmit encrypted binary files. If the enemy does suspect you, the first thing he will try, after visual surveillance of your house and your travels about town, will be a telephone tap. If all the enemy intercepts is innocent telephone talk, he may eventually decide he has made a mistake. On the other hand, if the enemy intercepts encrypted messages, he will be absolutely convinced that he has the right suspect, even if he can't break the code.

Establishing a method for secure communications is the most difficult problem faced by anyone engaged in covert operations. A secure communication system is almost always the most important weapon in any conflict situation. Therefore, part of any covert action plan must be to establish a communication system that can be trusted and that will not compromise any safe house. The most simple solution, which is described in my book *Running a Ring of Spies*, is the use of public phones or temporary safe places and prepaid phone cards[5] for covert voice and E-mail messages.

RULE SEVEN: DON'T THROW ANYTHING INTO A GARBAGE CAN THAT MIGHT TIP OFF SOMEONE TO YOUR COVERT ACTIVITIES OR PROVIDE INFORMATION ON YOUR PERSONAL MATTERS

Shred it or burn it, or better, do both. Aldrich Ames, the CIA agent turned KGB mole (for money), got careless with his garbage, and an FBI search of his trash can came up with a crucial bit of evidence that helped bring the spy to justice. This is good advice even for home owners and renters who think they have nothing to hide. Never throw away canceled checks, bill stubs, credit card vouchers, or any document that has any personal information such as bank and credit account numbers, tax information, birth dates of family members, Social Security numbers, and so on. Every such document provides information that a criminal might find useful.

RULE EIGHT: PROTECT YOUR PROPERTY FROM CRIMINAL ATTACK

If you won't let apparently law-abiding strangers into your safe house, you certainly don't want burglars, petty thieves, and vandals sneaking into the place. A criminal who, during the course of a burglary, discovers some evidence that the home owner is engaged in secret illegal activity takes away a get-out-of-jail-free card he can use the next time he gets arrested. He'll sell you out as part of his plea bargain. Good door locks, strong safes, outside lighting, inside alarm systems, and many other home security measures will not only help prevent crime but will also help discourage your enemy from a surreptitious entry if he should suspect you are running a safe house.

RULE NINE: CREATE A COVER STORY TO EXPLAIN TO NOSY NEIGHBORS, VISITORS, AND THE LAW ANYTHING THAT OCCURS AS A RESULT OF YOUR COVERT ACTIVITIES

This should include innocent explanations for late night activity, loud noises, strange smells, bulky packages in the mail, and visitors to the home (especially those arriving or departing at odd hours or who are dressed in a way that might arouse suspicion). You should also have a cover story that explains any sudden wealth your covert activity might produce, wealth that allows you to buy new cars, recreational equipment, and furniture and have expensive nights on the town. The cover story must be well thought out, believable, and designed to cut off further questions by curious people. Don't grab someone as soon as they enter your home and start telling them about your rich uncle who died, how much you won at poker, the old friend who is coming for a visit, the new cleaning woman you have hired, how your son made a mistake with his chemistry set that resulted in a loud bang at two in the morning, or how you sometimes sell articles that you write to magazines. Let the story out only when others ask questions. Then, answer the questions, but don't add more information than the question requires.

The cover story should always make you look like the typical, dull, good citizen. Make sure every resident of the house, even minor children, understands this rule and knows well the cover story they will give.

Follow the KISS rule: keep it simple, stupid. Aldrich Ames escaped official attention for years despite buying fancy cars and an expensive home by casually talking about his rich in-laws living in Colombia.[6]

RULE TEN: IF YOU ENGAGE IN ANY COVERT ACTIVITY OUTSIDE OF YOUR HOME, MAKE SURE THAT THE ENEMY WON'T BE ABLE TO TRACK YOU HOME

If you are going to join a militia unit, enlist in a sex club, recruit commercial spies, organize a political protest, join the underground as an assassin, or engage in any other risky behavior outside your home, don't use your own name, and certainly don't tell people where you live. Create and use a false identity.

Even if you are not doing something covert or illegal, use a false identity whenever practical, even while engaging in everyday activities. Use one while you are traveling, meeting strangers, hitting the bars, and checking in to hotel rooms. (Pay cash; don't use a credit card.) Tell the talkative grandmother sitting beside you on the plane that you are a freelance writer. Introduce yourself with a fake name to the stranger who wants to exchange business cards and tell him how you've just gotten off welfare because a rich uncle died. Pretend to be a businessman expecting to close a deal when you check in to a hotel in a strange city. There are two reasons for doing this. First, it's not easy to learn the art of deception; we need all the practice we can get. Playing a role using a false identity demands as much practice as playing a role on the stage. You can't practice it with friends; you must use strangers. Look at every contact with a stranger as a chance to practice the art in a nonrisk situation.

Second, we all need all the privacy we can get. Do you really want every hotel employee, travel clerk, waiter, barfly, and fellow traveler to know your name, where you live, how much you make, what political causes you support, and how many children you have? Why make it easy for some nut or criminal you innocently offend to start stalking you?

It is legal to use a stage name or a pen name, provided you don't do it as part of a fraud scheme. John Wayne wasn't born with that name, Joseph Stalin's mother knew him as Josif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvil, and Lenin grew up as Vladimir Ilich Ulyanov.

It's easy to create and use a temporary false identity, and there are a number of books available that explain how to do so. Most of the time, a false identity needs nothing more than announcing to the world who and what you claim to be. I have used a nickname all my life. Although every friend knows that name, the name doesn't appear in any public record. Even so, I only give my common nickname to people I want as friends. The strangers I meet seldom learn who I really am.

Add a few business cards and a couple of easily manufactured fake IDs, and such an identity will pass most inspections short of an arrest or traffic stop. Don't write checks or use credit cards while using a false identity unless they are backed up with real bank and credit card accounts.[7] Better still, don't write checks or use a credit card when you can use cash, especially if you are purchasing an item or service that will support a covert activity. When you get your cash from the ATM and then pay for dinner, a motel, or anything else, you leave no record that can trace you from one address to the next.

Don't give your real name and address to anyone unless you expect some specific worthwhile advantage for doing so and the action supports and protects your reputation as a law-abiding, trustworthy, honest citizen. Do that, and your home remains your safe house where you can go if you have to run for it, dropping your fake identities as you head for home.

Whenever you engage in any covert activity outside your own home, especially when you do so under a false flag, practice surveillance avoidance before you return to

your own home. Don't use a vehicle that will give away your identity while you are engaging in covert activities; don't make any telephone calls to your safe house while you might be under surveillance; and don't carry any documents that might give an enemy your real identity. You and all those who know about your covert activities must take every possible precaution to ensure that no one is following any of you from a covert activity to your safe house.

RULE ELEVEN: DON'T ENGAGE IN ANY COVERT ACTIVITY INSIDE YOUR OWN HOME THAT INVOLVES OTHER PEOPLE WHOM YOU WOULD NOT TRUST WITH YOUR LIFE

Never use a personal home for any covert activity that involves anyone who is not a willing and trusted supporter of the covert activity. If you are trying to enlist someone in your cause, you should handle the entire recruitment process in an aggressive safe house away from your home and business while using a false-identity cover story.

In high-risk situations, if you can't count the number of trusted allies who know about your covert activities on one hand, you shouldn't be using your home as a safe house. Your home should be your retreat where you can continue to live your real life if your covert activities are discovered and you manage to escape without the enemy discovering your real identity.

RULE TWELVE: IF YOU SPOT ANY SURVEILLANCE OR DISCOVER ANY EVIDENCE THAT THE ENEMY IS SUSPICIOUS OF YOU, IMMEDIATELY STOP ALL COVERT ACTIVITIES IN YOUR HOME

Destroy or remove all incriminating evidence of your covert activities from your home. If you must continue with

the covert activities, it's time to find another safe house, one that the enemy doesn't know about. The greater the chance that your activities will attract the attention of a sophisticated enemy, the more important it will be to find a safe house apart from your residence.

Follow all of these suggestions, and your home will be the sanctuary you want it to be. Very probably, it will be the only safe house you will ever need. It will also be a place where you can offer sanctuary to those who are fighting the fight that you want to win and who need a place to hide, to tend their wounds, and to meet with others who share your cause.

ENDNOTES

1. The techniques for evading surveillance are beyond the scope of this book. There are a number of good books on the market, including several in the Paladin catalog that cover surveillance.

2. A simple example of home security deceit is using a light timer or leaving a radio or television on. Another is to tell your newspaper subscription service that you are canceling your subscription because of a disagreement with the paper's editorial viewpoints rather than because you will be away for the summer; this way someone with access to the subscriber list will think you are still there.

3. "The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized."

4. No home can be a safe house if the neighbors call the police to investigate domestic violence.

5. Prepaid phone cards are not totally secure, as Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh discovered. The long-distance company selling the card keeps records of all calls made on the card, record-

ing both the number from which the 800 number was dialed and the number called. To make sure that no one can identify you as the person making the call, always 1) buy the card anonymously, 2) buy cards in small denominations, 3) use a different card and different phone for each call, and 4) never use such cards to make a call from your home, or from any phone that can be identified as one you have easy access to.

6. His wife's parents were scraping by at just above the poverty level, until their daughter, who married a CIA agent, started sending them lots of money.

7. Perhaps the easiest way to legally acquire a credit card with a fake identity is to sign up for a prepaid credit card, which are offered to bad credit risks. To get one, you must send a substantial deposit, which then becomes your credit limit. Because the companies that offer such cards take no risks and collect investment interest on the money they hold, they don't spend a lot of time checking out the bona fides of their customers.